

Increasing the sustainability of production of Victorian Strawberry Growers

- Location:** Port Phillip and Westernport, Victoria
- Region:** Port Phillip CMA
- Industry:** Strawberries
- Group:** Victorian Strawberry Industry Development Committee (VSIDC), Victorian Strawberry Growers Association (VSGA)
- Issue:** Improving the production and environmental performance of the Victorian strawberry industry
- Key Outcomes:**
- Farm Plans and action plans developed by 20 strawberry growers (50 by 2007)
 - Farm walks, field days and information material developed
 - Increased profitability and sustainability of strawberry growers
 - Expected decreased nutrient, soil and water runoff from strawberry properties

Background

About a third of Australia's strawberries come from the fertile soils around Port Phillip and Westernport Bay. As the industry uses soil, water and nutrients intensively, there is a high potential for soil loss and nutrient runoff. Many producers implement best management practices such as deep ripping, green manure cropping, grassing between rows, drip irrigation and soil and sap testing. However practices that manage water once it has left the cropped area are less widely implemented.

The Project

The project has helped plan and implement a producer-driven process linking principles in developing productive and sustainable farming practices with science and planning. The initial phase of the project involved 10 strawberry growers undertaking an assessment process that identified the current state of their production sustainability and environmental performance, with particular emphasis on their management of nutrients and water once it had left the cropped area. The second phase of the project helped the growers develop a whole farm plan and action plans for on-ground works to modify and improve their nutrient and water runoff management. The project also promoted the broader strawberry industry through farm walks, by publishing property management and action plans, industry facts sheets and articles, and through a strawberry industry field day.

Outcomes

The project has encouraged growers to develop and implement farm and action plans to support sustainable production on their properties. Another 20 strawberry growers are now commencing the assessment and whole farm planning phase of the process, while the original 10 participants are proceeding with the implementation phase of their plans. On ground actions currently being implemented include using aquatic plants in drainage lines, using native ground and tree vegetation to mop up wet areas, grassed waterways designed to manage storm events, engineered sediment traps, pits and dams, and direction change of strawberry bed rows to reduce water velocity between rows.

The Future

The strawberry industry hopes to offer all growers an opportunity to participate in the assessment, planning and implementation phase of managing nutrient and water post crop, and believes that the whole farm planning phase will help strawberry producers plan for improved performance in other management aspects of strawberry production. Growers participating in the project have indicated that the activities undertaken within the project have complimented their Quality Assurance processes, and in one instance the whole farm plan developed has been used as evidence in an application for EurepGap accreditation.



Construction of a sediment trap which will reduce strawberry property nutrient run off, and provide nutrient recycling options for future strawberry crops

A strawberry property demonstrating best practice use of grasses and riparian revegetation to better manage runoff, and develop crop production and habitat benefits

Strawberry grower Eddie Di Pietro and DPI project officer Mark Hincksman examining aerial photos and action plans.

(Photos: Mark Hincksman)